

Residentially Based Services (RBS) Reform Project Feedback Report for Sacramento Demonstration Site Review Conducted October 13, 2011

Background:

An on-site review of the Sacramento RBS Demonstration Project was conducted on October 13, 2011, by representatives of the California Department of Social Services, the San Francisco RBS Demonstration Project county and provider agencies, and Hay Consulting. (See Attachment A for a list of individual Site Review Team members.) By the time of the review, the Sacramento Demonstration Site had been in operation for 14 months. It had enrolled a total of 26 youth placed by either the county child welfare or probation agency with one of three RBS providers.

The purposes of the review were to assess fidelity to the county's approved RBS Memorandum of Understanding and the county's continued conformance to RBS tenets as their program evolves; to monitor RBS implementation and identify implementation glitches for resolution; to identify local technical assistance needs; and to begin assessing quality of services delivered. An additional benefit of conducting the review was to engage San Francisco as a "peer" Demonstration Site in the review process in order to promote the identification and dissemination of best practices among the four RBS Demonstration Sites.

Prior to the on-site portion of the review, the Demonstration Site was asked to provide a report of the "RBS Days of Care" for each youth admitted to the RBS project since it began. This was designed to illustrate how youth have moved through the residential group care component to lower level foster care placement and, eventually, to permanency. It was also designed to capture any use of crisis stabilization.

The actual on-site review consisted of group and individual interviews, as well as the review of randomly selected provider comprehensive plans of care for enrolled youth. Group interviews were conducted separately with county staff and with provider staff. Individual interviews were conducted with 10 client youth and members of three families, pursuant to the RBS site review protocol that a minimum of three youth and one family member are to be interviewed from each provider. All interviews were conducted using standardized interview questions. The protocol also established the number of comprehensive care plans to be reviewed at 30 percent of youth enrolled in RBS. For the Sacramento Demonstration Site, comprehensive plans of care were reviewed for eight youth. The review team also toured one of the providers' facilities.

Observations and Recommendations:

The following discussion is intended to capture at a high level (1) what is working well in the local Demonstration Site; (2) what challenges have been encountered by the site and how the Demonstration Site has chosen to address those challenges; and (3)

additional changes the Site Review Team recommends the Demonstration Site consider incorporating.

Strengths:

The Sacramento Demonstration Site enjoys a strong, collaborative partnership among participating county and provider agencies. With over a year of experience operating the pilot, participating agencies appear uniformly invested in making RBS work for their target youth and families. Successful strategies have been employed in the areas of family engagement, care coordination, utilization management, therapeutic interventions and staff training. Examples of these strategies include:

- Employing skilled Parent Partners who build relationships with families, identify needs, and support families in executing Plans of Care.
- Providing concrete support to resolve issues that may affect family stability, including linking family members to community services.
- Making structural changes to the residential facility to facilitate family participation, and offering group social events for family involvement.
- Providing individualized support to families to overcome barriers to participation, including providing transportation and scheduling events at the family's convenience.
- Conducting Family Support Team meetings that are family-driven and offer a forum for family and youth to define goals and receive support.
- Ensuring youth understand their individual plan for transition back to the community.
- Clarifying enrollment criteria to more precisely match appropriate youth to the RBS program.
- Utilizing the Local Implementation Team as an oversight committee, bringing partner agencies together to resolve problems and closely tracking cases for the purpose of keeping youth on pace for transition to lower levels of care and permanency.
- Employing Functional Family Therapy by all providers as a portable therapeutic intervention to be used in all placement environments.
- Offering joint training among RBS staff and between RBS and traditional foster care staff to promote understanding of the differences between RBS and traditional foster care.

Adaptations Made by the Sacramento Demonstration Site to Address Challenges:

A number of challenges have arisen that caused the Demonstration Site to re-examine expectations and assumptions, and revise practice in order to enhance service delivery and improve case outcomes. The Sacramento Demonstration Site has demonstrated commitment, resiliency, and teamwork in addressing challenges and developing and implementing adaptations which support the model. The most critical challenges and adaptations are discussed below.

- Child Protective Services youth have proven to be more difficult to work with than probation youth, perhaps because probation youth are under threat of

incarceration. The Demonstration Site has worked to address increased behavioral disruptions, including holding frank discussions with staff about safety issues.

- As youth transition from the residential component into the community component, families are eager to move on from the program making it more difficult to keep these families actively involved in the RBS program. This is particularly true with probation youth. The initial approach was to provide social and therapeutic activities for families at the residential campus even though the youth had progressed into community placement. This was more convenient for the providers, but resulted in a drop-off of family participation. As a result, providers are identifying ways to engage families in the community setting, building more “natural” supports for families that will endure post-RBS.
- A number of youth have remained in group residential placement beyond the target goal of nine months. While a steeper than expected provider staff learning curve to fully adopt RBS principles and practices has factored into this, the Demonstration Site also recognizes that engaging family members needs to start upon application to and entry into the program.
- The Demonstration Site learned that a subtle, but powerful, change in language helped clarify and strengthen the engagement process. Instead of verbalizing the program’s goal as achieving permanent placement for the youth, the providers learned to express the goal as building permanent family relationships.
- Family finding was not built into the Sacramento Demonstration Site’s program or funding models. Although a permanency option is identified for a youth at intake, it is difficult to predict the level of participation and depth of commitment of family members. It is also difficult to determine why some families are unable to utilize available services and support which would advance their ability to provide permanency. Moreover, some families have barriers, such as homelessness and criminal records, which must be addressed before they can become viable permanency options. As a result, the Demonstration Site has engaged in limited, informal family finding and recognizes the need to build contingency plans in case the initial permanency options fail.
- For some cases, care coordination among providers and the county has been complicated by a dynamic tension in which the provider questions the ability to serve the youth in that group residential placement while the county adheres to a strict “no reject/no eject” policy. Collaborative and creative problem solving has to be employed to resolve this on a case-by-case basis.
- Utilizing the Functional Family Therapy model within the RBS construct created initial difficulties due to the limitations Functional Family Therapy imposed on how and when individual and family therapy could be provided. The Demonstration Site had to re-negotiate terms under which Functional Family Therapy could be more flexible in order to ensure the individualized needs of the youth and family were being met within the overall RBS framework without compromising the integrity of the Functional Family Therapy evidence-based model. In addition, providers intensified their approach to working with families in the first 90 days to better prepare them for participation in both the Functional Family Therapy and RBS models.

- Insufficient referrals are being generated to keep providers at full capacity. There is a general recognition that more needs to be done to enhance awareness of RBS as a placement resource among social workers and probation officers.
- The automated payment system, CalWIN, prohibits multiple payments on behalf of the same client for the same period. Consequently, when the provider claim for services provided to the youth while in the community component of RBS was submitted and paid, the CalWORKS payment to that youth's family was stopped. As a temporary workaround, the county manually issued the appropriate payment to the family. The county is convening a group to work with the CalWIN organization to devise a permanent solution.

Observations and Recommendations of the Site Review Team:

The following are observations the Site Review Team made in addition to those identified above by the Demonstration Site:

- Successfully transitioning youth out of residential group care within an average of nine months is a fundamental component of the Sacramento Demonstration Site's RBS program model and critical to the sustainability of its funding model. Review of the RBS Days of Care Schedule identified that, of those youth who successfully exited from residential group care, the average stay in RBS group care was approximately eight months. However, of the youth enrolled in the RBS program (residential plus community placement) for nine months or more, half had remained in RBS group residential placement longer than the target goal of nine months by the end of the reporting period. Of the half that remained in residential group placement for longer than nine months, their placement in group care ranged from approximately ten months to 12 and one-half months during the reporting period. While this may be related to a slower than expected provider staff learning curve, the lack of formal family finding services, and the need to start family engagement much earlier in the process, this should be carefully monitored to determine if it continues in the future.
- Review of the provider's Comprehensive Plans of Care revealed that providers documented excellent crisis plans. However, comprehensive care plans typically relied on therapy as the means to achieve the case goal(s). Mention was not made of the other innovative activities done to support and engage the youth and families. The case plans should be more comprehensive and specific to capture these innovative activities.
- Youth and family interviews indicated support for the RBS program and appreciation for the RBS provider staff as being caring and supportive so long as those staff remained in place. Changing therapists and high staff turn-over were cited as emotionally and therapeutically disruptive.

Below are Site Review Team recommendations for change in addition to the adaptations already employed by the Sacramento Demonstration Site:

- Consider adding formal family finding to the Sacramento RBS program. Youth need more permanency options and more committed permanency options. Even if a youth is enrolled with a family member identified, that option may fail; family

finding may be needed at any time during the youth's enrollment. Moreover, the entire RBS team needs to engage in family finding. It appears to be most effective when not limited to a single family finding specialist.

- Although many of the difficulties encountered in utilizing the Functional Family Therapy model under RBS have been resolved, the Demonstration Site is encouraged to monitor the application of Functional Family Therapy within the RBS framework and continue to hone the therapy model as necessary to enhance its support of RBS practice.
- Consider emphasizing the youth's "natural" supports in the Family Support Team rather than relying so heavily on the professional members of the team to provide that ongoing support.
- Consider addressing provider staff turn-over issues.
- Consider training provider staff on how to document innovative activities and supports in the comprehensive plans of care.

Training and/or Technical Assistance Requested:

The Demonstration Site requested the following:

- Assistance providing refresher training for staff on a quarterly basis.
- Assistance resolving the CalWIN claiming issue.

Conclusions:

The Sacramento RBS Demonstration Project is operating in substantial conformance with the program described in its Memorandum of Understanding with the California Department of Social Services and with the principles and practices of RBS. However, it is still too early to draw conclusions about client outcomes and fiscal implications.

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